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Human resources management

Joint Inspection Unit

Staff mobility in the United Nations

Note by the Secretary-General*

Addendum

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit for the consideration of the members of the General Assembly his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Staff mobility in the United Nations" (JIU/REP/2006/7) (see A/61/806).

* The submission of the present note was delayed because of the need for extensive consultations.

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Summary

The present document is submitted to the General Assembly pursuant to paragraph 4 (d) of article 11 of the statute of the Joint Inspection Unit. It provides the comments of the Secretary-General on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Staff mobility in the United Nations" (see A/61/806), which examines the implementation of policies related to staff mobility in the United Nations and its impact in the process of human resources management reform and on the performance of the Organization. The Secretary-General welcomes the report of the Joint Inspection Unit and appreciates the recognition of the importance of staff mobility and its essential role in increasing the Organization's flexibility and responsiveness to new challenges. The Secretary-General has a number of reservations about the assertions and findings contained in the report, which are explained in detail in this report.

I. Introduction

1. The Secretary-General welcomes the recognition by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) of the importance of staff mobility and its essential role in increasing the Organization's flexibility and responsiveness to the new challenges, and in meeting a growing need for international civil servants to acquire multiple experiences and competencies in order to respond to broadening organizational needs.

2. The Secretary-General, however, has a number of reservations about the assertions and findings contained in the report and does not agree with all of its conclusions and the recommendation. This is owed in part to the fact that the study was untimely, as it sought to assess a policy that would not be fully implemented until 1 May 2007 and that was evolving while the study was conducted.[1] The General Assembly provided further guidance on the implementation of managed mobility at its sixty-first session in its resolution 61/244.

II. Main findings

Organizational mobility culture

3. The report states that the consultations have been insufficient and that there is lack of the acceptance of mobility on the part of staff and management. It stresses that there are significant challenges ahead for the full and effective implementation of policy owing to the large number of staff, and the fact that there are at least 23 occupational groups, not all of which are replicated in all duty stations.

4. The Secretary-General agrees that mobility in the Organization has been inadequate so far. As a result, the needs of the Organization in that respect have not been met. The current policy was introduced so that mobility of staff can be managed both to meet the needs of the Organization and promote and support individual staff development. The number of staff and occupational groups indeed makes mobility more complex and does not allow for rotation as in the United Nations funds and programmes. However, the organizational policy takes this into account. The Secretary-General believes that all staff can benefit from mobility, whether it takes place within or between duty stations or occupational groups.

5. Mobility is not a new concept at the United Nations. It was identified as an element of the strategy for the management of the human resources of the Organization introduced by the Secretary-General in 1994 (A/C.5/49/5). The Secretary-General highlighted the need to take concrete steps in promoting career development and mobility in his 1997 report entitled "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform" (A/51/950). Since the introduction of the policy in 2002, considerable progress has already been achieved in promoting an organizational

[1] The report draws substantially from draft texts prepared by the Secretariat on mobility, in particular, the management position paper on mobility prepared for discussion with staff representatives at the 27th session of the Staff-Management Coordination Committee. After the Committee session, two reports of the Secretary-General, "Human resources management reform" (A/61/228) and "Investing in people" (A/61/255), were issued, presenting updated views on mobility, an analysis of the impact of the reforms to date, the rationale for further change, and a detailed elaboration of proposals for the full implementation of the mobility policy starting in May 2007.

culture of mobility. Achievements in that respect have been reported in the two most recent reports of the Secretary-General on human resources management reform (A/61/228 and A/61/255).

6. Regarding the issue of consultation, an extensive consultative process has been conducted from the inception of the policy through its formal introduction to its current status. The extensive consultations with staff, managers and Member States prior to the introduction of the mobility policy are amply documented in the reports of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly and the records of the Staff-Management Coordination Committee sessions. Mobility was discussed at the twenty-third session of the Staff-Management Coordination Committee (1999), where it was agreed that mobility was an important and complex issue requiring further consideration and a full discussion at a subsequent meeting. The report of the Committee on its twenty-fourth session (2000) reflects extensive discussions of mobility, during which consideration was given to proposals submitted by management, the Geneva Staff Coordinating Council, the Staff Council of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the Staff Union Committee of the Economic Commission for Africa and the staff representatives attending the twenty-fourth session of the Committee. The discussions resulted in 16 points of convergence (about which the New York Staff Union had reservations), most of which are reflected in the current mobility policy and its implementation plan. Notably, the Committee agreed at its twenty-fourth session that "mobility should be viewed in its broadest sense, with mobility requirements being fulfilled by movement among functions, departments, occupations, duty stations and organizations beyond the Secretariat" (see A/61/806, para. 23). This statement has become the basis for the definition of mobility used by the Organization in its current policy.

7. Noting the consultations conducted at the twenty-fourth session of the Staff-Management Coordination Committee, the Secretary-General presented mobility as one of the building blocks of a comprehensive human resources management implementation programme in his report on human resources management reform (see A/55/253, paras. 38-44 and annex IV). Annex IX of the same report stated that a worldwide survey of work/life issues that influence staff members' work and decisions about mobility had been undertaken to ascertain the issues of major concern to staff.

8. The elements for administrative issuances to govern the new system of recruitment, mobility and promotion were the subject of a working paper submitted by management for discussion at the twenty-fifth session of the Committee (2001). Prior to the introduction of the mobility policy as part of the new staff selection system, comments on the administrative issuances establishing the new staff selection were received from staff representatives from seven duty station and heads and chiefs of administration/personnel from 23 offices and departments. These comments were carefully reviewed and addressed in the redrafting of the administrative issuances that were promulgated in April 2002 in the Secretary-General's bulletins ST/SGB/2002/5 and ST/SGB/2002/6 and administrative instruction ST/AI/2002/4. Following the promulgation of these administrative issuances, the Committee agreed at its twenty-sixth session (2002) that the management had consulted extensively with staff on all aspects of the new staff selection system and, in the process, had taken into account a significant number of staff concerns.

9. Recognizing the need to allow sufficient time to promote an organizational change with regard to the concept of mobility and to prepare staff and managers for the implementation of the mobility policy, the mobility policy was introduced in 2002, with post occupancy limits to be enforced in May 2007. During the intervening period of five years, concerted efforts have been made to introduce the concept of mobility and create programmes and mechanisms to prepare and support staff for mobility. In 2005, the Office of Human Resources Management launched a global mobility information campaign for staff at large to continue to build awareness of the mobility policy and inform staff of the support available to help them prepare for mobility. The campaign included a letter from the Assistant Secretary-General/Office of Human Resources Management to all staff and managers followed by briefings with senior managers, executive officers at New York Headquarters and human resources chiefs from offices away from Headquarters. Town hall meetings and information sessions were organized for 10 departments and offices at New York Headquarters to provide information and answer questions. Human resources chiefs gave briefings at the United Nations Office at Geneva, the United Nations Office at Vienna/the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations Office at Nairobi/the United Nations Environment Programme/the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the Economic Commission for Europe and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Printed and electronic materials containing answers to frequently asked questions and suggestions on preparing for mobility were made widely available on i-Seek.

10. The extensive consultative process and the familiarization campaigns that have taken place and are ongoing have generated a much better understanding of and increased support for mobility. It is acknowledged that full implementation of the policy represents a major culture change in the Organization, which has generated and will continue to generate a certain amount of resistance, as is typical. This, however, is not a valid ground for postponing implementation of a policy that is clearly to the benefit of the Organization and is supported strongly by staff in most duty stations. The Secretary-General will continue to consult with staff and managers on further improvements to the mobility policy and to report to the General Assembly as requested.

Strategic plan for mobility

11. The report states that a comprehensive strategic mobility plan is not in place with quantifiable objectives that identify, inter alia, the locations targeted, the type and volume of staff movement and associated indicators to measure progress in the implementation of the policy. It further notes that the mobility programme should be an integral part of human resources planning and that a gap analysis should be undertaken to assess current skills and future needs of the Organization.

12. The Secretary-General agrees that the mobility policy has to be well planned. Implementation of the mobility policy is taking place in the context of overall human resources planning, which covers 28 departments and offices. A detailed strategy was put in place to implement the organizational mobility policy. The first

two phases of the strategy have been completed. The first phase (2002-2004) involved introducing the concept of mobility, promoting organizational change, and creating the programmes and mechanisms to prepare and support staff. The second phase of refining the mobility policy and a strategic implementation plan, and developing the information technology (IT) infrastructure to support mobility, was completed in 2005. Further refinements to the policy and infrastructure and awareness-building are continuing during the third phase. The final phase of implementing managed mobility for staff other than those at the P-2 level will begin in 2007.

13. In order to ensure that staff are prepared for mobility, a number of initiatives have been taken to support staff, including (a) training programmes to introduce the new staff selection system and mobility policy to staff at all levels at all duty stations; (b) workshops for staff and managers on career planning; (c) the establishment of career resource centres in all major duty stations; (d) a revised e-PAS that includes a career development goal, a learning goal and expression of interest in mission assignment; and (e) the issuance online of generic job profiles covering the majority of Professional posts and General Service posts (G-5 and higher) to clarify job expectations.

14. In order to ensure that there are incentives for staff to move to duty stations with high vacancy rates, special provisions for faster career advancements and financial incentives are in place. Recognizing that incentives alone will not be sufficient to encourage mobility unless progress can be made in addressing obstacles to mobility, the Organization has undertaken efforts to examine and address work and life issues, in particular difficulties faced by dual-career families. To that end, the General Assembly, in its resolution 61/244, invited host countries to review, as appropriate, their policies for granting work permits for spouses of United Nations staff.

15. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit concludes that the lessons learned from the P-2 pilot mobility programmes "cannot be directly extrapolated to other levels and/or categories of staff". Noting that P-2 Professionals have fewer family responsibilities, the report concludes that these conditions may be different for staff in more senior positions. However, such broad assessments of the family responsibilities of categories of staff are not appropriate, particularly when it can just as easily be said that it would be more difficult for young professionals with newborn children, than senior professionals with college-bound children, to be mobile. The reasons for mobility, which include the need to acquire new skills and gain fresh perspectives, are applicable at every level of one's career, including at the most senior level.

16. The Secretary-General believes that the experience gained with managed mobility of staff at the P-2 level is valuable and relevant, particularly with respect to changing the organizational culture to accept mobility as one of the conditions of service with an international organization.

Mandatory versus voluntary mobility

17. The report distinguishes between voluntary, mandatory and managed approaches to mobility. It criticizes the mobility policy being pursued by the Organization, stating that while the current mobility policy promotes voluntary

mobility, it is a mandatory approach, contradicting the Secretary-General's statement that the Organization would move from a voluntary to a managed approach to mobility. The report further observes that the primary responsibility for mobility should rest with the substantive management, not with the central human resources function.

18. The discussion of the mobility policy described in the report under this heading is at variance with the mobility policy actually introduced by the Organization. Prior to the introduction of the mobility policy in 2002, mobility was undertaken by staff members on a voluntary and ad hoc basis. With the introduction of the mobility policy, staff members were placed on notice that they would be required to move upon the expiry of the post occupancy limits — that is the essence of "managed" mobility. Since 2002, the Organization has facilitated and encouraged the voluntary reassignment of staff members in preparation for the managed phase. Records on staff mobility in 25 departments show an increase from 10.8 per cent in 2002, when the policy was first introduced, to 15.3 per cent in 2005.

19. Managed mobility is multifaceted in that it facilitates the movement of staff who wish to move on their own by providing career and work/life support and provides for the managed movement of staff who have reached their post occupancy limits to ensure that the needs of all concerned are taken into account. The managed mobility compendium will provide to staff who have reached their post occupancy limit the opportunity to express their preferences for posts and locations. It will also provide to managers the opportunity to review these staff members and express their views on those they consider would best meet the needs of their respective offices. The preferences and views expressed by staff members and managers will be taken into account to the greatest extent possible when deciding on individual moves. However, the global nature of the Organization requires a central overview and management of the process in order to address effectively the needs of the different departments and offices throughout the global Secretariat and to determine whether particular skills and functions that may appear to be specific to one department would be needed elsewhere in the Secretariat. In this context, mobility has to be centrally managed, in close cooperation with both managers and staff, to ensure consistent application of the policy, taking into account the relevant General Assembly resolutions.

Mobility as a managerial tool

20. The report argues that mobility is inconsistent with results-based management since managers will no longer be able to determine the type of staff they need to achieve their objectives. Moreover, it is stated that heads of departments and offices "should retain the authority over lateral transfers within their departments and offices".

21. As recognized in the report, the Organization requires mobility as a means to develop a more multi-skilled and versatile workforce. In this context, the interest of managers in retaining particular staff members beyond their post-occupancy limit cannot be placed above the Organization's interest in implementing the mobility policy. This does not mean that managers will be deprived of qualified staff to carry out their programmatic objectives, as the matching of staff members during the mobility exercise will be based on evaluations by managers. The authority of heads

of departments and offices to transfer staff laterally within their own departments and offices will remain unchanged.

Mobility linked to career development

22. The report states that the current policy gives the same value to geographical mobility as to so-called across-the-corridor mobility. It further states that it is not properly linked to staff career development.

23. There is a clear differentiation between mobility within duty stations and mobility across duty stations, the latter being a more important factor in career development. Currently, two lateral moves are required to be eligible for promotion to the P-5 level and above. Service in duty stations away from Headquarters can reduce this requirement to one move. Further, as indicated in the report of the Secretary-General "Investing in people", to respond to the request of the General Assembly that geographical mobility be a more important factor in career development, geographical mobility or service at a field mission or another agency, for at least one year in the same or a different duty station, will be introduced as a precondition for promotion to the P-5 level and above. This will help to ensure that by the time a staff member has reached the P-5 level, he or she has had a diverse background with increasing responsibilities, including supervisory experience, and, therefore, has a more integrated perspective and ability to contribute more fully to the work of the Organization. It should also be noted that achieving the objectives of advancing career development through mobility is in fact measured by the substance of the change in functions. A staff member who is expected to perform substantially different functions as a result of a lateral move would acquire new skills essential for career development, regardless of the physical location where such functions are performed.

Mobility as a contractual requirement

24. The report states that the diverse types of contractual arrangements currently in place constitute one of the major obstacles to the implementation of the mobility policy. It also cautions about the possible legal implications and refers to the concern expressed by the Office of Legal Affairs that the policy appears to change the conditions of service of staff.

25. The Secretary-General agrees that the existing contractual arrangements need to be simplified to facilitate mobility. A proposal to this end has been presented to the General Assembly. Existing contractual arrangements, however, do not prevent the implementation of the current mobility policy, which at present applies to staff holding contracts for one year or longer under the 100 series of the Staff Rules.

26. Staff regulation 1.2 (c) provides that "staff members are subject to the authority of the Secretary-General and to assignment by him or her to any of the activities or offices of the United Nations". All appointments of staff members are subject to the Staff Regulations and Rules and to such changes that may be duly made in these provisions; this principle is explicit in all letters of appointment. The General Assembly has repeatedly emphasized the "requirement of mobility of all internationally recruited staff of the Organization as an integral part of their obligation" (resolution 53/221, section III, para. 7) and recognized that the

requirement for mobility is "one of the essential elements of contractual status of staff" (resolution 55/258, section V). Given the formal introduction of the mobility policy in 2002 in administrative issuances, and the extensive information campaigns undertaken afterwards to build awareness of the mobility policy among the staff at large, staff members cannot credibly claim that they are unaware of the mobility policy and are not bound by it. The Secretary-General is, therefore, of the view that the assessment of potential legal implications of the full implementation of the current mobility policy is incorrect.

27. It should also be noted that the memorandum from the Office of Legal Affairs dated 10 September 2001 provided advice at the early stage of elaboration of the new mobility policy. That advice was taken into account in the subsequent elaboration and finalization of the policy, after an extensive consultation process.

Mobility policy versus institutional memory

28. The report notes that increased mobility can negatively impact institutional memory if not managed properly and that there is a need to build mechanisms for knowledge transfer and continuity of expertise into the mobility process.

29. The Secretary-General believes that numerous measures that have been put in place, as described in the report "Investing in people", will ensure that mobility does not negatively affect the continuity and the quality of services or the institutional memory and capacity of the Organization. These measures will be further enhanced with the introduction of new information technology tools. Initiatives have also included rotating staff through different assignments to expand the knowledge base and broaden the shared institutional memory.

Potential financial implication

30. The report states that the issue of financial implications seems to be neglected altogether and that the implementation of mobility should be quantified.

31. The resource implications for the proposals on mobility were set out in the report "Investing in people", and some of the proposals were approved by the General Assembly in its resolution 61/244. These costs include additional staffing resources, common services requirements, and expanded staff development and career support programmes to support mobility. As the mobility policy is yet to be fully implemented, it is difficult to speculate on the number of staff who will move across duty stations as a result of the managed mobility policy, and the consequent financial costs, and to compare those costs to costs that would have been incurred to fill vacancies by new recruits or in the context of movements taking place outside the managed mobility policy. As requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 61/244, information on financial implications will be provided at its sixty-third session, upon completion of the first phases of managed mobility.

Mobility to share the hardship burden

32. The report indicates that the mobility policy needs to address the concerns of staff who are concerned that they will not have opportunities to leave the field after

serving in a hardship duty station, and implies that staff members willing to serve in a hardship duty station for a limited period should have a right to be returned afterwards to a non-hardship duty station.

33. The Secretary-General agrees that every effort must be made in the implementation of the policy to ensure that some staff members are not continuously moving from one hardship duty station to the next and that all have the opportunity to serve at both hardship and non-hardship duty stations in the course of their careers. In so doing, however, care will be taken not to perpetuate the existing distinction between field staff and other staff, who should not have an exclusive right to "their" post at Headquarters or other established duty station, as that would unduly limit the opportunities for field staff.

Accountability for mobility

34. The report states that, while management and staff members are given some responsibilities, the Office of Human Resources Management is given only authority without clear accountability.

35. As discussed in the addendum to the report "Investing in the United Nations for a stronger Organization worldwide" (A/60/846/Add.6), relating to accountability, accountability requires a clear definition of responsibility, authority and results to be achieved. Where new elements of responsibility and authority, as they relate to the implementation of the mobility policy, are introduced, it is important that those elements be clearly set out, as was done in the report "Investing in people". The Office of Human Resources Management is and will remain accountable to the Secretary-General for the manner in which it discharges its responsibilities; in turn, the Secretary-General is and will remain accountable to the Member States for the proper management of human resources.

III. Conclusion

36. The Secretary-General takes note of the views expressed in the JIU report and, subject to the comments above, will take them into account, as appropriate, in further refining the mobility policy and implementing it in accordance with section IV of resolution 61/244.